

Correspondence

The future of venereology

TO THE EDITOR,
British Journal of Venereal Diseases

SIR—After a long life, during which at most times I have been engaged in some controversy or another, it seemed to me that I might stand aloof from the difficulties which some of my colleagues in venereology are raising for the subject and for themselves. But Dr. Grimble's letter (*Brit. J. vener. Dis.*, December, 1975, vol. 51, p. 410) was too much for me.

Physicians have a bad record in the subject of venereology. Over the years, until quite recently, they regarded it as a dirty, unpleasant subject beneath their notice, a strangely perverted attitude for a group of people which claims all problems of humanity as its own. The attitude arose, I suspect, partly from the ingrained puritanism of the English middle classes and partly from an exaggerated estimate of the importance of physicians as members of the Senior Service of Medicine. The problem had to be undertaken by surgeons who may have their limitations, as Dr. Grimble suggests, but who are, at any rate, taught to think clearly and to be realists. For various reasons, most of them concerned with the efforts of people now dead, the subject has achieved a degree of respectability in recent years and the physicians seem disposed to adopt it, albeit with some reluctance. The term 'venereal disease' apparently brings distasteful recollections of the past, so it was proposed that the clumsy title 'sexually transmitted diseases' should be substituted. But the word 'sex', although seemingly a major preoccupation of so many members of our society, apparently still offends delicate susceptibilities in the ivory towers of Regent's

Park. So we are now asked to use the term 'genito-urinary medicine'. Quite apart from the fact that no-one working in the subject has any real knowledge of diseases of the kidneys, ureters, and bladder, it should be abundantly clear to anyone who stops to think that the relationship of the venereal diseases to the sexual function, with all the human problems and difficulties that this entails, is the strongest justification for the separation of this subject from other branches of Medicine and the strongest guarantee of the need for its survival in the future.

These unwise changes have been promoted by a small but influential group of venereologists who are pursuing this course without proper consultation and, I suspect against the wishes of the majority. If they are successful they will destroy a subject which remains of paramount importance and which has gained so much by its recent separation from other disciplines. It will become a neglected ancillary of nephrology or some other minor branch of Medicine. Venereology is, and always has been, a branch of Medicine, but if the present promoters of these changes have their way the surgeons will have to pick up the pieces again.

Before this happens I can only hope that sanity will prevail, either by a change of heart on the part of those who are doing the damage or by a revolt on the part of the sensible majority of venereologists.

Yours faithfully,

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Venereology in a psychiatric hospital

TO THE EDITOR,
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SIR—The present policy in France is to allow male and female psychiatric patients to mingle freely, because this is a normal life situation and is therefore regarded as therapeutic. Whenever idle persons of both sexes mix without restraint they are apt to be sexually promiscuous. Among psychiatric inpatients the risk of pregnancy has been obviated by means of contraceptive measures, but these do not prevent the transmission of venereal disease.

A number of cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea diagnosed among psychiatric inpatients came under our care. Infection had been acquired from other patients, visitors,

or during visits to the town. Doctors in charge of patients in psychiatric hospitals should be aware of the dangers of sexually transmitted disease consequent upon these new conditions of freedom.

When such diseases are diagnosed the importance of tracing and treating contacts both inside and outside the hospital should be borne in mind.

Yours faithfully,

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